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FIGHT AGAINST MAOISTS WILL BE INTENSIFIED, SAYS SHAH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah reached Chhattisgarh on Monday and visited the 31 jawans injured in Bijapur ambush

FIGHT HAS REACHED A DECISIVE TURN

Shah also chaired a high-level meeting at Jagdalpur on the Left Wing Extremism situation. Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, senior officials of the state police and the CRPF were present in the meeting. Later, he said the assault has brought the fight to a decisive turn. After paying homage to the 22 fallen personnel, he said their sacrifices will never be forgotten | P10

ATTACK INDICATES REBELS' DESPERATION

- Shah said the assault indicated the desperation of the rebels in the face of security forces making inroads into their strongholds
- He said there will be no let-up in intensity of the fight, but the government will take into account the representations of tribal leaders and temper security presence with regional development

1 MISSING

SOME JOURNOS INFORMED BY MAOISTS THAT THE JAWAN IS IN THEIR CAPTIVITY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Busiest polling day in 4 states, one UT

Third phase of voting in Assam and Bengal, single-phase poll in Kerala, TN & Puducherry

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

TUESDAY will mark the busiest day of the election season with Assam, Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Bengal going to polls.

Assam will witness the third and final phase of voting, while it's a single-phase for Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. For Bengal, it's the 3rd of the 8th-phase voting that will end on April 29. The results will be declared on May 2.

In West Bengal, 205 candidates are fighting for 31 seats. Among the prominent contestants are Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee and journalist Swapan Dasgupta.

In Assam, 337 candidates are vying for 40 Assembly constituencies. The Congress-led grand alliance may have an edge as most of the constituencies going to polls on Tuesday are dominated by Bengali-speaking Muslims, who are known to support the grand old party.

In Kerala, 957 candidates are contesting in 140 seats. The ruling CPM-led LDF hopes to retain power by breaking the state's famed 'incumbency jinx', while the Congress-led UDF is confident of winning a comfortable majority. Meanwhile, the NDA is eyeing the kingmaker position by bagging seats in double-digits. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, former CM Oommen Chandy and Metro Man E Sreedharan are among the big names in the fray.

Tamil Nadu is where the largest number of candidates — 3,998 — are vying for 234 seats. The main fight is between the ruling AIADMK-BJP alliance and the DMK-Congress coalition.

In Puducherry, 324 candidates including 35 women are vying for 30 seats. P9

90 VOTERS IN A BOOTH, 171 VOTES CAST

In Assam, 171 votes were cast in a Haflong booth that had just 90 eligible voters in phase II of polling. Five poll officials suspended

EXPRESS READ

Man murders sister in 'honour' killing

Bengaluru: In a suspected case of 'honour' killing, a 19-year-old girl was stabbed to death, allegedly by her brother Kiran (24) at their house on Sunday night. When police questioned family members, they revealed that Kiran was upset over her relationship, and had threatened to kill her. P5

5.4 magnitude quake strikes Sikkim

Gangtok: An earthquake of 5.4 magnitude hit Sikkim on Monday night, the National Centre for Seismology said. The quake occurred at 8.49 pm at a depth of 10 km near the India-Bhutan border. People rushed out of their houses, but no loss of life or property has been reported so far, an official said.

In relief, top court stays BSY's trial in land case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi/Bengaluru

IN a major relief to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, the Supreme Court on Monday stayed the trial against him in an alleged corruption case related to denotifying land acquired for a government housing project in Bengaluru during his previous term in 2011.

A three-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice of India S A Bobde, stayed the January 5 order passed by the Karnataka High Court restoring the criminal case against Yediyurappa and two others.

For Yediyurappa, who has been facing one obstacle after another, the top court's order came as a much-needed breather ahead of the bypolls to two Assembly seats and one parliamentary seat. The Apex Court had, in January, stayed his arrest in the case.

During the hearing, senior advocate K V Vishwanathan, appearing for the CM, said that despite the stay on arrest, the trial was proceeding against him and needs to be stayed. The bench agreed and ordered a stay while stating that it will hear the case on merits.

The allegation by activist Alam Pasha was that during his tenure as CM between 2008-11, Yediyurappa had denotified 26 acres of land acquired by the government for construction of houses for low- and middle-income families. This was part of an upcoming IT park project at Devanahalli Industrial Park in Bengaluru Rural district.

The SC's decision comes at a time when the CM is facing various challenges from within and outside the government and even his own party. Last week, Yediyurappa's plea to quash a case filed against him for allegedly attempting to poach MLAs was rejected by the Karnataka High Court.

Just days ago, RDPR Minister K S Eshwarappa had written a five-page letter to Governor Vajubhai Vala accusing the CM of interference and arbitrary sanctioning of funds to MLAs and his kin. The letter came weeks after a sleaze CD row compelled Ramesh Jarkiholi to resign as minister, resulting in embarrassment for the Yediyurappa government.

Tax 'evasion': K'taka HC junks I-T dept plea against DKS' discharge

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Income Tax Department suffered a huge setback on Monday with the Karnataka High Court upholding the orders passed by the Special Court, discharging Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president D K Shivakumar, in cases of tax evasion and destroying evidence.

Justice John Michael Cunha dismissed the appeals filed by the I-T Department against Shivakumar discharge from all the three cases.

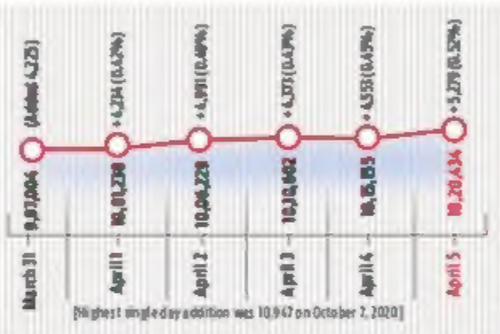
The I-T Department had filed three criminal revision petitions before the High Court against three separate orders passed by the Special Court to try criminal cases against MPs/MLAs, in the city. The orders allowed the applications filed by Shivakumar seeking discharge from the alleged offences, in February 2019.

The I-T Department filed three complaints under Section 276C(1) of Income Tax Act, read with Sections 201 and 204 of IPC, against Shivakumar for alleged evasion of tax to the tune of ₹3.14 crore, ₹2.56 crore and ₹7.08 crore for the assessment years 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18, respectively, and also for destroying evidence.

CONTINUED ON: P4

SPEED AND RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN KARNATAKA

The first Covid case in the state was reported on March 8, 2020. Since then, until April 5, 2021, a total of 10,20,434 cases have been reported in one year and 27 days.



[Highest single day addition was 10,947 on October 2, 2020]

POSITIVITY RATE
APRIL 5, 2021
4.64%
(Increased for the first time since Sept 27, 2020 when it was 12.54%)

32 State's death count on Monday, the highest in the second wave

- Five lakh vaccines have been sought for Mysuru, says district in-charge minister S T Somashekar
- 26 students staying at an orphanage and 33 workers of a garment factory in Kolar test positive
- Despite cases rising, officials in Shivamogga invite thousands of Ashraya housing scheme beneficiaries to look at 24 sample flats in Govindapura
- Tumakuru City Corporation to launch two mobile vehicles for RT-PCR tests

5K New cases in K'taka; Consider pandemic seriously till May-end, warns minister

GOWDA DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

Former PM HD Deve Gowda was on Monday discharged from a private hospital in Bengaluru, after recovering from Covid-like symptoms. On March 31, the 87-year-old JDS supremo had said that he and his wife Chennamma had been admitted to the hospital for treatment. Gowda walked out of hospital, escorted by medical staff, and has been advised rest. "I am dumbfounded by the love, concern and good wishes shown by each one of you after learning that I and my wife had developed Covid symptoms. It is your love which is my greatest strength and I appeal to you not to worry about my health. I am well and will return to public life soon," Gowda said in an open letter to his partymen.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

ON a day the state recorded over 5,000 fresh cases of Covid-19, Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar warned that there is a possibility that Bengaluru alone may see more than 6,500 cases per day if people do not follow Covid-Appropriate Behaviour. "Health experts have pointed out that if Karnataka does not contain the spread, we will see a further surge in cases," he pointed out.

"As per the Covid-19 Technical Advisory Committee, we need to consider the pandemic seriously till May-end. We may face a shortage of beds if the number of corona cases increases drastically. There is a need to increase the number of beds for Covid-19 patients in Victoria and Bowring Hospitals and we will do that. Also, there is a need to increase the beds reserved in private hospitals for Covid treatment from the existing 20 per cent," Sudhakar noted.

The minister said he has collected information regarding availability of beds in government hospitals and the state has also initiated talks with private hospitals to reserve more beds for Covid-19 treatment. "If the situation warrants, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa is willing to take suggestions from Opposition parties as well," he said.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently interacted with representatives of eight states and has suggested stringent measures. Maharashtra has now imposed tougher measures. If Karnataka gets into such a situation, tougher measures will become inevitable. We should not underestimate the scale and speed at which the infection is spreading," the minister cautioned.

"More than 46 lakh people have been vaccinated so far. After talks with the Union Health Ministry, an additional 15 lakh doses have been allocated to our state out of which 10 lakh doses have been sent to Bengaluru and five lakh dose to Belagavi," he added.

BBMP Marshals penalise a man for not wearing a mask at Kempegowda Bus Station in Bengaluru on Monday | ASHISHRISHNA HP

RAMESH JARKIHOLI TESTS POSITIVE

Former water resources minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, who is allegedly involved in the CD gate, tested positive for Covid, and is under treatment at Gokak taluk hospital, a doctor treating him said on Monday. Jarkiholi failed to appear before SIT officials on Friday, citing health issues | P4

Middleman in Rafale jet deal kicks up fresh row

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE newly inducted Rafale fighter jets flew into a fresh storm with a French online journal claiming that manufacturer Dassault Aviation paid €1 million to an Indian middleman as gift after the ₹58,000 crore government-to-government deal in 2016 for 36 jets for the Indian Air Force.

The suspect payment was detected by French anti-corruption agency, Agence Française Anticorruption (AFA), during audit, revealed Mediapart. It identified the recipient as Defsys Solutions, a group run by a Gupta family, including Sushen Gupta, who has been under investigation over his role in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam.

The report kicked up a political storm with Congress demanding a thorough probe and the BJP rejecting charges of corruption as completely baseless.

AFA inspectors came across the suspect payment of €508,925 under the head 'gifts to clients', for which Dassault produced an invoice from Defsya. Mediapart, citing the AFA report, said, "This invoice, which related to 50% of the total order (1,017,850), was for the manufacture of 50 (mega sized) models of the Rafale C, with a price per unit of €20,357."

ISRO CASE

CENTRE MOVES SC IN ESPIONAGE ROW

The Union Government has sought urgent hearing on the report filed by a panel regarding the role of erring police officials in the 1994 case relating to ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan, who had been acquitted and was eventually awarded ₹50 lakh compensation by the top court | P9

HC orders CBI probe, Anil Deshmukh resigns

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mumbai

HOURS after the Bombay High Court ordered a CBI probe into the damning allegations of extortion against Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh, the minister finally put in his papers.

Till now, Deshmukh had brazened it out though he was locked in a bruising controversy, with former Mumbai Police commissioner Parambir Singh alleging the minister had set a monthly target for police officers to extort ₹100 crore from various businesses on his behalf. With the Bombay High Court observing that the charges against Deshmukh were serious, warranting a thorough probe, his party, the NCP, realised his continuation in the government was untenable.

"There is a legitimate public expectation of a free, fair, honest and impartial inquiry into such allegations which have surfaced in the public domain," the court observed. The CBI will submit its report in 15 days.

After the court order, Deshmukh rushed to meet his party president Sharad Pawar. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar joined them later. "It was decided that the Bombay High Court order is serious. Hence, it will not be right for Deshmukh to continue as home minister. Once he steps down, he can approach the Supreme Court," a source said.

It emerged that NCP Member of Parliament Supriya Sule and party's state president Jayant Patil were not in favour of sacking Deshmukh, but Sharad Pawar overruled them to limit damage to the party's image. P10

TRAINING GOES FOR A TOSS

With pools shut, top swimmers preparing for int'l meet left high and dry

ASHIM SUNAM @ Bengaluru

MOST of India's elite swimmers, who were training in Bengaluru for an international meet, have not had access to the pool for the last three days after the Karnataka Government ordered all pools to be shut due to a rise in Covid-19 cases. The closure of the pools has hampered the preparation of athletes like Srihari Nataraj, who is yet to compete internationally since the lockdown last March.

However, there could be some relief for the swimmers after the Karnataka Swimming Association (KSA) president Gopal Hosur and secretary Satish Kumar met Chief Minister B S Yeddiyurappa and Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar on Monday.

The KSA is expecting an official order on Tuesday and remains hopeful of a positive outcome.

"We met the CM and Health Minister. I told them that there are Olympic swimmers training here and closing of pools affects the sportspersons. If they miss coaching for a single day also, their programmes get upset too," said Hosur. "There is no need to permit swimming for fun, but they should at least permit competitive swimmers. The KSA will ensure that all SOPs are followed by everyone concerned. Even states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, which also have cases on rise, have not shut down pools," he contended.

The Swimming Federation of India is keeping a close tab on the situation and secretary Monal Chokshi has been in touch with the KSA officials, who have assured them that at least elite swimmers will be given permission to train.

"I spoke to the Karnataka Swimming Association president Gopal Hosur, and they have been given an assurance that the competitive training will be permitted. If nothing else, training should not be interrupted for at least this group of swimmers in Bengaluru, who will travel internationally. If some relaxation or some specific order can be secured, it will be good for everyone," said Choksi.

CONTINUED ON: P3